MODERN PROBLEMS

RELIGION

A CRITICISM & A FORECAST

G. LOWES DICKINSON

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PROBLEMS OF THE DAY.—II

RELIGION

A CRITICISM AND A FORECAST

PROBLEMS OF THE DAY

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By G. Lowes Dickinson

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RELIGION

A CRITICISM AND A FORECAST

G. LOWES DICKINSON

FIFTH IMPRESSION

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INTRODUCTION

THE chapters that follow were originally published as articles in the *Independent Review*,* and are reprinted here by kind permission of the editor. I have left them substantially in the form in which they first appeared, for I do not feel that I am at present in a position to improve them. But perhaps I may make my point clearer by a few words of introduction. My main object has been to raise, definitely and unequivocally, the question of the relation of religion to knowledge. I have urged that there is only one method of knowledge, that of experience and legitimate inference from experience. And while freely admitting, and even insisting upon, the importance of every kind of experience as material for analysis and discussion, I have argued that any truth that

* See the numbers for October, 1903, and May, June, and November, 1904.

is to be elicited from such experience must be elicited by the method of science, in the broad and proper sense of the term. In other words, truth, I have maintained, is not revealed, in any sense of the word 'revelation' which can be appropriately distinguished from the sense of the word 'science.' And though it may be the case that truth may be knowable or known about God, or the soul, or other objects of religious belief, it can only be known, or knowable, like all other truth, by perception, analysis, and inference.

This, then, is my first point; and it is one of great importance, because it affects the whole position of the Churches. For, unless there is such a thing as revelation, in the sense of a distinct and peculiar avenue to truth, open exclusively to the members of a particular religious organization, such organization can claim no unique privilege as a teacher of doctrine, however useful it may be as a moral or social influence. Once it is admitted that religious truth is attainable, if at all, only by the method of science, it must be conceded also that the notion of a Church with a revelation of divine truth is as absurd as the notion of a mathematical society with a revelation of mathematical truth. Truth, of whatever kind

it be, may originate anywhere, and be communicable everywhere.

Supposing this to be admitted, I have gone on to a further question: If religion is not a special revelation of truth, what is it? And I have suggested that there is a certain attitude towards life which is very valuable, and which, in my opinion, may appropriately be called religious. This attitude I have defined as a reaction of the imagination upon the world as we conceive it in the light at once of truth and of the ideal. This attitude it is the object of my third chapter to expound and illustrate. But I recognise that many people may hold that the view of religion thus suggested is too wide and too indefinite. Some element, they will maintain, of hope or faith is essential; and they will deny that there can be a religion of pessimism. Such a denial would appear to be inconsistent with the ordinary use of language, seeing that it is customary to describe Buddhism as a religion, although it denies the value of life. But this verbal question is not one of great importance. The important thing is to consider whether, in default of knowledge, there remains open to us a legitimate attitude towards the objects of religion other

than, though not interfering with, that of agnosticism. In my last chapter I have suggested that there is such an attitude. I have called it 'faith,' but with a full recognition of the ambiguity of the word. It has been suggested to me that my meaning would be better expressed by the word 'hope.' But that word, I think, is too weak, as the other is too strong. What I have wished to indicate is an attitude of what I may call active expectancy—the attitude of a man who, while candidly recognising that he does not know, and faithfully pursuing or awaiting knowledge, and ready to accept it when it comes, yet centres meantime his emotional, and therefore his practical life about a possibility which he selects because of its value, its desirability. Such I conceive to have been the attitude of Plato when he wrote his myths, of Wordsworth when he platonized, of many poets, and perhaps of many religious teachers. I think it an attitude that it is possible to maintain, though I recognise the readiness with which it might lead into the illegitimate position of believing a thing to be true because we desire it. I also think it an attitude that is good, for it keeps the horizon open. The mistake of agnosticism, so it seems to me, has been that it has said

not merely 'I do not know,' but 'I will not consider.' Such a position, I think, is hampering, not only to life, but to truth. For the impulse to truth is desire; and all discoveries are prompted by hope and by faith. For this reason the unknown may be more important than the known. Knowledge itself may cover the eyes with scales; and such scales it is the business of faith to purge away.

CHAPTER I

ECCLESIASTICISM

The practical importance of religion in the history of society, the profound influence it has exercised from the beginning upon human development, the incalculable power of its motives and its sanctions over the whole life of man, are matter that now lies beyond dispute. Never again will it be possible to believe, as it was believed in the eighteenth century, that religion was a cunning invention of priests and kings for their own advantage. We know now that it has its roots deep in human nature, as deep as the primitive instincts and emotions, with which, indeed, it is inextricably intertwined. No one, whatever be his own beliefs, can afford not to take account of it; for if it were nothing else, it is a force, and, like all forces, must be reckoned with.

All the more important is it carefully and

dispassionately to consider what ought to be its place in the society of the future. And such consideration must, I think, fall under two main heads: First, whether any religion, or which, is true; secondly, whether any, or which, and under what conditions, is desirable or, as some might hold, necessary. To some minds, the second question might seem to be disposed of by the answer to the first. For, it may be said, if a religion is true it ought to be believed, and if it is false it ought to be discredited; and there is no more to be said about the matter. This opinion, however, I do not think is one that is really at bottom accepted by a number of the most influential apologists of religion. On the contrary, religion has in the past derived, and in the present is, I believe, increasingly deriving, a great deal of support from the conviction, not that it is true, but that it is necessary. And if it be urged that it is not possible to believe a thing to be true because one desires to believe, I would reply that it is possible at least to decline to consider the matter, to regard the whole inquiry as ruled out by practical considerations, and to support an institution of which the object and function is to perpetuate a belief, merely on the ground,

whether or no it be avowed, that the belief is useful. It is for this reason that the question whether religion is desirable may be treated independently of the question whether it is true—nay, that the answer given to the latter may depend, not in logic, but in practice, on the answer given to the former. And that is my justification for raising the one issue independently of the other. I propose in this chapter to discuss the position, that religion ought to be supported, not primarily because it is true, but because it is necessary to society. And in this discussion I propose to consider that form of religion which seems to offer most support to the position I am examining. This form I shall call ecclesiasticism.

By ecclesiasticism I mean religion as embodied in a Church; and by a Church I mean an organization which claims to be the depository of a truth otherwise inaccessible to the human reason, and which, therefore, endeavours to propagate its doctrine by appeals, not primarily to the reason, but to the emotions, the hopes and fears, the prejudices and habits, the deep-rooted instincts and the æsthetic sensibilities of men. It is clear that, if this definition be accepted, there is a great

deal of religion which has nothing to do with ecclesiasticism. All that, however, I leave at present out of consideration, not because it is unimportant, but because, for my immediate purpose, it is irrelevant. For a religion which rests simply on the deliverances of an individual conscience could hardly give a basis for the position with which I am concerned. Such a religion is naturally anarchic in its tendencies, and has shown itself to be so in history. It could hardly form a secure foundation for a given order of society; and is not, therefore, the kind of religion supported by those who adopt the view I desire to discuss. An ecclesiastical religion, on the other hand, is essentially stable; and it is this kind of religion that people commonly intend when they assert that religion is necessary to society.

The position to which I refer is not so familiar, and has not been so ably and frankly expounded, in England as upon the continent; and to many English readers it may seem strange, remote, and unintelligible. Yet I think it is one which it is of practical importance for us to investigate; for it may be influencing, half-unconsciously, many people who have never formulated or

avowed it; and it finds natural allies wherever there is an established Church. Nor is it by any means among stupid people only that it finds its recruits. On the contrary, it commends itself specially to those who have been led by their reason to scepticism, and yet have convinced themselves that scepticism is dangerous to society; and these have been sometimes men profoundly versed in human nature, deeply concerned for the good of mankind, of catholic sympathies and wide experience. The deliberate conviction of such men demands a serious consideration, and I shall endeavour in these pages to give it the weight it deserves.

What, then, is the position? Briefly, I think, it may be put as follows: 'It is necessary to the existence of society that men should observe certain rules of conduct; that they should obey the laws, civil and moral, should respect property and life, should cherish the family, and should honour the King, or whatever may be the form of government; that they should be honest in business, faithful in service, generous to the poor, kindly to the weak; that they should hold their country dearer than themselves, and be prepared to sacrifice to it, on due occasion, their

wealth, their energies, and their lives. That men do, however imperfectly, conform to such rules as these is the extraordinary, the almost miraculous result of habit and prejudice. But how are habits and prejudices maintained? Not, assuredly, by reason. On the contrary, reason is their great solvent. Teach men to think about the basis of their life, and it crumbles away. For reason is critical, not constructive; it may destroy, but it cannot create. The problem, therefore, of statesmen is to lay reason to sleep, so far as fundamental questions are concerned; and for this no better agent can be found than religion as interpreted by ecclesiasticism. For a Church does not doubt, but affirms; does not ask questions, but answers them. Suppressing the critical faculty, it masses in defence of the foundations of society all the emotional resources of human nature. It not only defines the end, it creates the motive; and is thus, in a profounder sense than the laws, the bond of society. For it is the living spirit, they an external mechanical force. An alliance, therefore, between Church and State is natural, if not indispensable, and has been felt to be so by some of the greatest statesmen, even by those who themselves have

had no religious convictions; whence, for example, the remark attributed to Napoleon "If the Pope had not existed, I should have had to invent him."'

The position thus briefly stated might be copiously illustrated from continental writers of the neo-catholic school. I prefer, however, to quote an Englishman, and one who will not be accused of ecclesiastical prejudices. In Burke's 'Reflections on the French Revolution' the superiority of prejudice to reason is a principal and constantly recurring theme; and for the support of prejudice he looks primarily to the established Church. 'We Englishmen,' he says, 'are generally men of untaught feelings. Instead of casting away all our old prejudices, we cherish them to a very considerable degree, and, to take more shame to ourselves, we cherish them because they are prejudices; and the longer they have lasted, and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them. We are afraid to put men to live and trade each in his own private stock of reason, because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and

of ages. Many of our men of speculation, instead of exploding general prejudices, employ their sagacity to discover the latent wisdom which prevails in them. If they find what they seek—and they seldom fail, they think it more wise to continue the prejudice, with the reason involved, than to cast away the coat of prejudice, and to leave nothing but the naked reason: because prejudice, with its reason, has a motive to give action to that reason, and an affection which will give it permanence.' So much for the value of prejudice. As for the means of maintaining it, we read a little later in the same book: 'The English do not consider their Church establishment as convenient, but as essential to their State; not as a thing heterogeneous and separable; something added for accommodation; what they may either keep or lay aside, according to their temporary idea of convenience. They consider it the foundation of their whole constitution, with which and with every part of which it holds an indissoluble union. Church and State are ideas inseparable in their minds, and scarcely is the one ever mentioned without mentioning the other.'

Such is the general theory of the importance of

a Church to society as formulated by one of the greatest of English statesmen. But the theory may be further supported by the lessons of history, and especially by that of the French Revolution—the event which, in fact, evoked the utterances that have been quoted from Burke. When Burke wrote the storm had hardly broken. A gleam of sunshine travelled in front of the approaching thunder-cloud; and while our English prophet was raising his warning voice the French were dancing in their orchards in anticipation of perennial summer. The tempest burst; and the reality exceeded the worst that Burke had divined. The Church fell, and with it the State; the crust of habit broke and was engulphed; the central fire burst through. Every cruelty, every vice, every sordid passion, crept out of hiding and walked the streets, jostling the rarest virtues. Every distinction of good and bad, true and false, was obliterated. A patriot was indistinguishable from an assassin, a republican from a tyrant, a statesman from a buffoon. Despotism and anarchy formed an incestuous union. And over this carnival of all the disintegrated elements of human nature presided an opera-singer in the guise of the Goddess of Reason. No wonder the

English hugged themselves in their ancient orderly routine, and swore with Burke that they were 'resolved to keep an established Church, an established monarchy, an established aristocracy, and an established democracy, each in the degree in which it exists, and in no greater!'

It would be easy to multiply examples tending to the same conclusion; to point to the political ruin of Greece accompanying the development of philosophy; to the decline of Roman morals as the State religion lost its hold; to the anarchy, political, intellectual and moral, that coincided with the Renaissance and the Reformation; to the Visconti, the Sforzas, the Borgias, the hysterical tragi-comedy of Munster, and the long agony of the Thirty Years' War. Or, confining ourselves to our own history, to trace the decline of the Puritan ideal, from the serene and starry radiance of Milton, to the dust and ashes of Muggleton and the Muggletonians. It would be easy to do this, if it were worth doing; and all that could be said on such lines would be true. But it would not be the truth. History may be used to support any conclusion, according to the emphasis of our conscious or unconscious principle of selection. And a history written on the lines suggested

above could be met by a rejoinder equally convincing. We have only to select the bad instead of the good elements in stability, and the good instead of the bad ones in disintegration, and the whole phenomenon will wear a different aspect. For then we shall see, not the excesses of the Revolution, but the iniquities it swept away: the starving peasants, the parasitic Court, the impotent or mischievous administration, industry fettered, intellect muzzled, virtue mouldering in the dust. And, concentrating our imagination not on the delicate and factitious charm, the brilliancy and wit of the aristocracy of the Court, but on all that lay at the roots, and was the condition of the life of that wonderful flower, we shall regard in a different light both the order of society and the organization by which it was supported; shall hear above the *Te Deums* of the Church the cries of the persecuted Huguenots, and the inarticulate misery of starving peasants; and remembering that the voices raised in behalf of common-sense and humanity proceeded not from the pulpit, but from philosophers and atheists, shall turn, not in levity, but in indignation, from Bossuet to Voltaire, and cry, with the great apostle of reason, 'Écrasez l'infâme.'

The example is sufficient to indicate the fatal flaw of ecclesiasticism. Just so far as it is calculated to support an existing order, just so far is it compelled to perpetuate abuses; for every conviction that repudiates reason repudiates also criticism, and therefore reformation. An ecclesiastical system moves, it is true, as a coherent and stable whole, but it moves under the control of fixed ideas; and these, even if once they were in accord with what is good and true, fall inevitably out of touch with it by the mere lapse of time. Of this the whole history of the Catholic Church is an illustration. That Church is now commonly regarded as one of the great civilizing agencies of the world; and I have no desire to dispute its claims. Let all that is urged for it in this respect be granted. Let it be admitted that it evolved order out of chaos, that it civilized barbarism, that it fostered the virtues of charity and peace in an age of universal war, that it kept alive the tradition of philosophy and culture, encouraged the arts, disciplined the mind, and inspired the spiritual life. Let all this be admitted, and nevertheless it is true that the evil wrought by the Catholic Church is so incalculable that a sober and impartial historian would hesitate

to pronounce whether, even to an age of barbarism it was more of a blessing than a curse. Consider its record. If it has preached peace, it has also filled the world with war; if it has saved life, it has also destroyed it; if it has raised the spirit, it has also degraded it; if it has kindled the intelligence, it has also extinguished it. Deliberately and in cold blood, in pursuance of a policy, it has tortured the souls and burnt the bodies of men. Deliberately it has struck at the root of virtue by evoking and fostering slavish fear and desire, by promising a material heaven and threatening a material hell. Deliberately it has invited men to lie, and punished them for adhering to the truth. Deliberately it has arrested, so far as it could, the nascent growth of science, and thwarted the only activity by which man may alleviate his material lot, and set himself free for the triumphs of the mind and the spirit. In saying this, I am stating simple matters of fact, such as no competent historian will dispute. And the point I want to make is, that the Good and the Evil of the Church have both proceeded from the same principle, from the principle of ecclesiasticism. Because the Church claimed to possess a revelation, therefore it conquered the world, and

therefore also it harried and tortured its conquest. Because it relegated reason to a secondary place, therefore it produced Dante and Aquinas, and therefore also it persecuted Galileo and burnt Bruno. Because it appealed primarily not to the intelligence of men, but to their fears and desires, therefore it imposed upon them an authoritative moral order, and therefore also it invited anarchy when the order was superseded.

For even the anarchy attributed to reason might more truly be attributed to the attempt to suppress it. That it is which divorces reason from experience, which makes it revolutionary and rebellious, instead of tentative, cautious, and practical; so that, in truth, the very order which ecclesiasticism has founded and sustained has prepared the chaos by which it has been succeeded. For if history shows anything, it shows that an ecclesiastical order will not endure permanently; and, it may be added, if it could, such endurance would be more fatal than any amount of confusion. For every order imposed upon the will at the expense of reason becomes, in the course of time, whatever it may have been at the outset, a chain that is only the more fatal to life if it is not felt to gall. To trust society to

the naked reason is to run the risk of anarchy, but to trust it to ecclesiasticism is to incur the certainty of petrifaction.

With the view thus put forward, probably most Englishmen, and even most English churchmen, will be inclined to agree, supposing the premises —the antithesis between ecclesiasticism and reason—to be accepted. But this antithesis may be denied; for reason, it may be urged, is not to be found in a pure and abstract form. It is inevitably biassed by something that is not rational. No one judges of what is good and true without prejudice; for man is not man in the abstract, as certain philosophers have loved to delineate him, but man here and now, of this century, of this or that place, of this or that calling in society. He is an Englishman, or a Frenchman, or a German; he has been brought up in such and such a home, in a slum or in the West End, in London, in a provincial town or in the country; he has been educated in a public school or in a Board school, or, it may be, at home; he has been to a university or he has not; he is an artisan, or an agricultural labourer, or a miner; a professional man, a politician, a journalist, or a gentleman at large; he has been

in love or he has not; he is married or single; he has travelled or stayed at home; and the total result of all these influences has been to envelop him in an atmosphere which determines, whether he knows it or not, all his most apparently unbiassed and objective opinions. But ecclesiasticism is only a way of creating such an atmosphere deliberately, instead of leaving it more or less to chance; and in so doing ecclesiasticism is only doing, more effectively and thoroughly, what is done by every home and every educational institution. A child takes the colour of his environment at home or at school as inevitably as he takes the colour of his Church. In neither case is reason the predominant or even an important factor. Why, then, should ecclesiasticism be singled out among the innumerable non-rational influences for special contrast with those that are rational?

The answer is that ecclesiasticism labours, deliberately and of set purpose, to fix the mind and character permanently in a certain mould—so far, at least, as what may be called fundamentals are concerned. Its object is not merely to give a certain bias—that is the object of every educational institution—but to make the subject

immune against all other influences to which he may be exposed in the course of his life. It is not so much the more or less unconscious giving of a bent that is in question; it is the giving of a bent which is, so to speak, itself a bent to a bent. It is the deliberate effort to prevent a man ever coming into the rights of his reason on the assumption that, in the most important matters, the reason is incompetent. This is a thing very different, and different in a most important way, both from the unconscious and inevitable action of social environment, and from such direct or indirect inculcation of moral habits as must be part of the work of any system of education. For the inculcation of such habits is quite compatible with such a development of the reason as will enable it in turn, when it is ripe, to question and to criticise them; whereas it is the very object of ecclesiasticism, as I have defined it, and as it has historically existed, to prevent the reason from ever making claims in the region reserved for revelation. The reason, it is true, will not, in either case, be acting *in vacuo*. But in the one case it is encouraged—or, at least, permitted—to act within the limits of its range; in the other it is deliberately bound and tied.

The distinction may be illustrated by a concrete example. An ordinary public-school boy is submitted, while he is at school, to very strong habitual influences, to a weight of public opinion more constant and more powerful in its pressure than he is likely ever to meet with again in the course of his life. Whether these influences are more good than bad I do not at present discuss. What I wish to point out is that, strong as they are, they are not what I have called ecclesiastic in their character; and that, although the services of the Church of England are part of the traditional routine, these services do not—and I believe I may fairly say they are not intended to—work powerfully upon the intellectual attitude of the boy. They are rather, if anything, one of the means of preventing him from having any such attitude. It is the boast of the school—whether justified or not is not at present the question—that it turns him into a healthy, instinctive kind of creature, decent, well-mannered, and, on the whole, right-feeling, but without any intellectual bias at all, and without any views or prejudices as to the basis of religious belief or the authority of the Church. Such a boy, transferred to the university, may very likely

go through his career there in the same condition of intellectual atrophy; but if his intelligence does awake, it will awake free. There will be nothing in the discipline of the university, any more than there was in the discipline of the school, to fetter it—nothing, that is, except the unconscious and inevitable influences of the society in which he moves. He may, as he often does, speculate boldly on the foundations of belief; may lose what is called his 'religious faith,' but what very commonly is no more than a block of unassimilated ideas, laid down like a pavement over the springs of religion by years of habitual but passive church-going; may question moral intuitions commonly supposed to be fundamental; and, after many mistakes and blunders, may emerge from it all a really useful and stimulating person, with some chance of contributing his mite to the clarification of ethical, social, and religious ideas.

But, now, imagine that the public schools and the universities were to adopt the ecclesiastical position; that they were to fall into a state of panic over the decline of religious belief, and to have recourse to ecclesiastical machinery to remedy it. From that moment everything

would be transformed. Just so far as the system were successful, just so far would the public-school boy be converted from a healthy barbarian into a hypocrite, a fanatic, or a saint. The chapel services, instead of being, as they are now, merely a part of the discipline of the school, would become real instruments of propaganda. Every agency of rhetoric, of ritual, of emotional and sensuous appeal, would be brought to bear, to make him feel and assimilate, with his whole being, what would rapidly cease to be the intellectual propositions, and come to be the instinctive belief, that the Church is of divine authority, that it has a final and immutable revelation of truth, that in philosophy, in ethics, in social institutions, the last word has been said, and that the function of the present is simply to apply, to the changing conditions of life, the known, fundamental, and eternal truths. At the university he would be subjected to the same influences. His whole training would be conditioned by the rule, that there is to be no inquiry into the foundations of belief. And the result would be that the universities would turn out year after year a succession of able, highly-educated men, whose one aim, so far as they

had a public aim at all, would be to preserve and perpetuate those institutions and ideas which it had been the object of their whole training to impress automatically upon their minds. Henceforth they would be hermetically sealed against the bacilli of new experience. Argument, feeling, touch, sight, would avail them nothing. Whatever might act as a solvent upon the structure of their ideas would be met simply as an enemy. Polemics would be their only method of controversy; and, though they might be able to convert, they would be unable to convince, just as they would be unable to be convinced, because they would be unable to conceive that their adversary might be right.

If this account of an ecclesiastical education be thought to be fanciful or exaggerated, I would ask the reader to recall the discipline devised for the propagation of his Order by one who was, perhaps, the greatest ecclesiastical genius the world has ever known; I mean the founder of the Society of Jesus. The training of a Jesuit as prescribed in the famous Institutes was based upon a process which a modern man of science might describe as self-hypnotization. By intense and solitary meditation, accompanied

by physical exercises, by fastings, flagellations, postures, groanings, weepings, he forced himself, so far as possible, to realize, to re-enact in his own person, the Passion of Christ, to ascend with Him to heaven, to taste, in anticipation, the joys of His kingdom, and to share the tortures of the damned in hell. Not the imagination only, and the intelligence, but almost the very physical senses were compelled to co-operate in this deliberate hallucination. He must not only think and conceive ; he must hear, see, touch, and taste. The whole personality, intellectual, moral—one might almost say physical—was run in this way into a final mould. That it should take that shape, uncritically, passively, not of conviction, but of force, was the essence of the whole process. But once that was achieved, development was permitted and encouraged along the lines thus rigidly prescribed. The mind henceforth was the tool of unquestioning faith. It might calculate, but it must not reason ; it might devise means, but it must not consider ends. Every accomplishment the Jesuit may and should acquire ; he should be a linguist, a mathematician, a man of science perhaps, above all a man of the world, accomplished, polite, persuasive, plausible,

up to date in his knowledge, his methods, his arts; he may be anything and everything, so long as he does not think, and obeys. He may study history as much as he likes, but it must be history as interpreted by the Church; he may study Latin and Greek, provided that he remains insensible to the classical spirit; he may study science, so long as he does not permit it to react upon theology. Nay, all these things he *ought* to study, in order that he may meet the enemy on his own ground. Only that the enemy is the enemy, that the truth is the truth, that the Church is the Church, and that his whole duty is to subordinate to the interest of his Order all his powers, spiritual, intellectual, moral, and physical—this is the never-forgotten command of his hypnotic dream, of the fixed idea branded upon him at the outset of his career by the deliberately anti-rational discipline to which he has been subjected. Once for all he has been cured of the possibility of asking, 'Why?' His reason has not been killed. No! It has been chained to the car of Faith; and in the car rides theology triumphant, surrounded by the saints of the Order, and crushing under the wheels the herctic, the speculator, and the unbeliever.

The example, it will perhaps be admitted, is sufficient to prove that there is an antagonism between ecclesiasticism and reason different in kind from that which exists between reason and any ordinary prejudice; that it is the object of an ecclesiastical system not merely to create an atmosphere, but to paralyze beforehand the agency by which that atmosphere might be disturbed; with the result, no doubt, of encouraging stability, but only at the cost of arresting growth. But it may be said that ecclesiasticism, as I have defined it, has ceased to exist, or, at least, has no future before it. If I thought that, I should not have troubled to write this chapter. But it is not, I believe, a view that is borne out by a survey of contemporary history. On the Continent, at any rate, the battle between ecclesiasticism and reason appears to be raging with an intensity of which we in this country have little conception. And, even in England, is it so clear that the issue has not been raised? The Church of England, I readily admit, has not commonly been ecclesiastic in the extreme and uncompromising sense in which I have been using the term. It has been, on the whole, and in comparison with the Church of Rome, a friend of compromise and of common-

sense. But it will be admitted that of late years it has been animated by a spirit very different from that which inspired it during the eighteenth, and for the most part during the nineteenth, century. Whether or no, from certain points of view, that spirit may be judged to be better than the old one, I am not at present concerned to dispute. I can believe that it is more zealous, more active, more devoted, more fruitful in a certain kind of result; but I am sure, and that is the point with which I am concerned, that it is more ecclesiastic. Every day it appears more and more to make the kind of claims that are made by the Roman Catholic Church, every day more and more to develop a similar machinery for silencing, by emotional appeals, the protests of the reason. While preserving the social and other advantages of the establishment, it is apparently determined not to acquiesce in the accompanying restraints. Now, just so far as the Church of England adopts this attitude, just so far as it assimilates itself to the Church of Rome, just so far is it alienating from itself not merely that large and increasing section of thoughtful Englishmen who cannot, except by courtesy, be called Christians (though they certainly cannot fairly be described as irre-

ligious), but also the whole body of Christian thought and sentiment included in the various Nonconformist bodies. A militant Church, confident in its mission, will, of course, regard such a statement rather as a challenge than as a warning. It will go in and fight, and expect to win. Only let it not suppose that the challenge so made will not be taken up. Many who would be glad to be relieved of the duty of setting themselves in antagonism to the Church, who feel to the full the appeal of its historical associations, to whom its ritual, its architecture, the very rooks amongst its ancient elms, preach in every village and town with an eloquence the more poignant and profound that it is half stifled in the smoke, the din, the multitudinous squalor of this age of industry—many, I say, who do not accept Christianity, and who yet would be loth to attack the Christian Church, will be, and are being, daily driven into an attitude of hostility by the new ecclesiastical policy and methods. The Church, it would seem, has before it—I hardly know whether I ought to say 'has'—two courses sharply contrasted and defined; and the future of the spiritual life of England will, I believe, be largely determined by its choice, if choice is still open to it. Either,

while preserving its organization intact, and the tradition of its forms and ritual, it may develop its intellectual position in the broad daylight, in full and candid intercourse with the reasoned convictions of men, and with their developing moral experience—and this, I take it, is the attitude of what is, or was, the Broad Church ; or, reverting to the position of a final and exclusive revelation, claiming, not merely a continuity of tradition, but an identity of fundamental doctrine with the medieval Church, insisting on a special and privileged position as the interpreter of God to man, repudiating philosophy, and so much of science as cannot be reconciled with its dogmas, and appealing always, in the last resort, not to reason and experience, but to authority, it may set itself, as the Church of Rome has done, across the whole intellectual movement of the age, and play for a supremacy over the conscience and the spiritual life deliberately based on supernatural claims, supported and reinforced by the Confessional and Mass. What may be the issue of the conflict thus provoked I do not care to predict. I know only that, should the Church be victorious, it will have saved society from the possibility of intellectual and spiritual anarchy,

only at the cost of arresting the growth of science, the development of the conscience, and all the hopes of a new and happier order which have been the inspiration of the noblest minds of the past century.

It is the issue thus adumbrated that gives a more than temporary interest to the controversy still raging in the sphere of elementary education. The reason why the continued control by the Church of more than half the public schools in the country is regarded with grave mistrust by many who are not animated by the jealousy of rival sects is simply the avowed determination of leading champions of the Church to use their power in the interest of ecclesiasticism. They hope to lay the foundation of their control over the intelligence of the country by bringing up a generation imbued from its earliest years with an instinctive and non-rational conviction of the authority of the Church, the efficacy of its sacraments, and the truth of its theology. This, and this only, can be meant by the creation of an 'atmosphere'; this, and this only, by the expressed hope that the school may have a door opening into the Church. To begin so is to start upon the inclined plane

which leads to a completely developed system, such as that which was elaborated by the Jesuits. Whether the attempt is likely to be successful in England I do not pronounce; but I am sure that it is one that the English, if they are true to their history, should resist to the uttermost.

I have thus stated briefly, and, I hope, not intemperately, what appear to me to be the valid objections to ecclesiasticism and to its intrusion into our schools. And if, in conclusion, I be asked, What, then, should be the aim of an educational system? I would reply, To surround a child with all the influences which society may judge to be healthy for body and soul, while at the same time training the understanding to become, when it is ripe, the critic and judge of those influences. The position has been put once for all by Plato, in a passage which ought to be inscribed over the door of every school in the kingdom. Plato, it is true, presupposes, what is also presupposed by the Church, that the atmosphere to which the children would be subjected in his ideal commonwealth would be the right and true one, so that the reason, when it awoke, would inevitably approve the discipline to which it had been subjected while it slept. But, on

the other hand, concurrently with the training of healthy instincts and perceptions, he postulates a free and liberal development of the understanding, and leaves to that the last word on the legitimacy of the whole process. Here is the passage—one that goes far beyond the scope of our contemporary disputes, and might well serve as an inspiration, not only to the Church, but to all who have in any degree the control of our national education :

"'We would not have our Guardians grow up amid images of moral deformity as in some noxious pasture, and there browse and feed upon many a baneful herb and flower day by day, little by little, until they silently gather a festering mass of corruption into their own souls. Let our Artists rather be those who are gifted to discern the true nature of the beautiful and graceful : then will our youth dwell in a land of health, amid fair sights and sounds, and receive the good in everything ; and beauty, the effluence of fair works, shall flow into the eye and ear, like a health-giving breeze from a purer region, and insensibly draw the soul from earliest years into likeness and sympathy with the beauty of reason."

'"There can be no nobler training than that," he replied.

'"And therefore," I said, "Glaucon, musical training is a more potent instrument than any other, because rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul, on which they mightily fasten, imparting grace, and making the soul of him who is rightly educated graceful, or of him who is ill-educated ungraceful; and also because he who has received this true education of the inner being will most shrewdly perceive omissions or faults in art and nature, and, with a true taste, while he praises and rejoices over and receives into his own soul the good, and becomes noble and good, he will justly blame and hate the bad, now in the days of his youth, even before he is able to know the reason why: and, when reason comes, he will recognise and salute the friend with whom his education has long made him familiar."' *

With what a breath of the air of dawn, what a gleam of Mediterranean light, do these words come wafting, as in a blue heaven, over the vapours and fumes of the Middle Ages, to remind us of what men were before they had learnt to distrust

* Translation by Davies and Vaughan.

their own fairest impulses and instincts, and to seek in authority the Good and the True which it is their privilege to divine through experience. With this passage sounding in our ears, I am content to leave the subject. For the spirit of Greece is the antithesis of the spirit of ecclesiasticism. And those who regard the latter as a danger could seek no better prophylactic than a wider and more popular dissemination of Greek culture.

CHAPTER II

REVELATION

In discussing, in the preceding chapter, what I have called ecclesiasticism, I defined it as religion embodied in a Church; and a Church I defined as an organization which claims to be the depository of a truth otherwise inaccessible to the human reason. I offered some arguments tending to show that the existence of such organizations—at any rate, when they adopt to the full the logical consequences of their position—has been, and perhaps still is, a grave danger to society. But I did not in that discussion approach the more fundamental question of the nature and justification of the claim to possess an authority independent of, and superior to, reason, and the connection of religion with such a claim. It is this question which I propose to discuss in the present chapter.

In doing so, I shall have to venture boldly and

without reserve upon topics which it is customary to treat with a reticence hardly compatible with complete honesty. Perhaps, therefore, I may be permitted at the outset to express my regret should anything I may say give offence to the religious instinct of any of my readers. Nothing is further from my intention or desire; and, indeed, I hardly believe that it will be those who have the finest sense of religion that will be the most inclined to resent my candour. Rather it is precisely they who will be the most willing to investigate the ground and nature of their belief, and who will repudiate the application to this momentous question of a method of hushing up and slurring over which they would deprecate in any of the ordinary business of life. Such readers, I think, will not receive what I have to say in a spirit of hostility, however profoundly they may disagree with it. And should they, as may very probably be the case, find my treatment to be more summary and dogmatic than comports with the difficulty of the subject, I will ask them to remember that I am sacrificing much that might otherwise be desirable to the effort to state precisely and clearly an issue which, as I think, is precedent to all theology, and vital to all religion.

That issue I would put, in a preliminary way, as follows:

'Is there a way of attaining truth about real existences which is different in kind from the method of science or of philosophy—which depends not upon direct perception, internal or external, clarified by analysis, tested by comparison, and supplemented by inference, but upon some peculiar and unique intuition having a validity superior to any other, and not properly subject to the ordinary critical tests?'

Some such way of attaining truth seems to be implied in what is called revelation. And it is the claim to rest upon revelation that gives to religion, as it is commonly conceived, a unique and peculiar place among the forms of human activity. It is that which underlies the exceptional position assumed by certain Churches, and gives an exceptional weight to particular books. And, though I do not myself think that religion depends upon revelation, yet its character cannot fail to be profoundly modified by our acceptance or rejection of such an avenue to truth. The question, therefore, which I propose to put is one of great importance. It is the question whether the idea of revelation can be made to agree with the

normal intellectual assumptions of the twentieth century; and we may, perhaps, best approach it if we begin by asking what kind of truth it is that is supposed to be communicable by revelation, and not communicable by other methods; for by taking this point first we shall be able to narrow the field of inquiry.

Now, if we consider the great religions of history, and especially Christianity, with which we in Europe are most immediately concerned, it appears that they include in their revelation two distinct kinds of information: the first dealing with matters of fact stated to have occurred in the past, the second with truths, affirmed to be eternally valid, about God and His relation to the world. I shall take first the question of historical fact—the propositions, let us say, that Jesus Christ existed at such and such a date, that He was born of a virgin, that He did and said such and such things, that He was crucified and buried, that He rose again, and that He ascended into heaven; and on this point I would simply ask my readers whether they really do believe that facts of that kind ought to be accepted on any other evidence than that of history itself—whether they believe that there is a short-cut to those particular

pieces of information, such as would certainly be repudiated in the case of any other historical events? If anyone replies in the affirmative, I have on this head no more to say. But if, on the other hand, it be agreed that the truth of the story of the life and death of Christ must stand or fall by the ordinary criteria of evidence, then that whole question is removed from the sphere of revelation to that of history; and religion, so far as it is conceived to depend upon the facts we are considering, becomes dependent upon historical inquiry. This is, in fact, the position which, as I cannot but believe, educated and intelligent men do now, and will more and more in the future, adopt. But if that be so, and in so far as it is so, the result must be a profound modification of the character of religious belief.

For those who are acquainted with the nature of historical inquiries, the uncertainty of testimony, the prejudice of witnesses, the doubtfulness of documents, and have watched, in other religions than the Christian, the growth of myths and the creation of fictitious personalities, may easily assure themselves, without entering far into the laborious inquiry, that its results are bound to be in the highest degree tentative and uncertain,

that scholars to the end of the chapter will continue to disagree and to dispute, and that, in fact, there is not evidence sufficient in quality or in quantity to establish any unquestionable final truth. Now, in an ordinary historical inquiry, this might be a matter of small moment. Men do not much or profoundly care whether, for example, Lycurgus existed or no, what was the exact contribution to the constitutional history of Athens of the reforms of Draco or of Solon, nor about any of the thousand and one similar points which are the subject of historical controversy. But it is a very different matter when they are asked to stake their whole conception of life on the dubious result of inquiries so difficult. And a man who thinks about the issue at all, and is bent upon honesty, will, I believe, incline to set aside the whole controversy as irrelevant to whatever is really essential in religion, and seek elsewhere than in history the basis on which to erect the fabric of his belief and conduct. He may, indeed, find a religious inspiration in the recorded life and sayings of Christ. But the inspiration would be the same, whether he regarded the record of the Gospels as myth or as fact; and would depend, not on the existence of Christ in the past or in

the present, but on the conception of life embodied in His story.

Such, I cannot but think, must be the ultimate result on every really religious and candid mind, of an acceptance of the scientific criterion in connection with the recorded life of Christ. It does not, of course, follow that many men will not continue for a long time to reject this conclusion. For men tend always to believe what they want to believe, not what they are justified in believing; and many people do very much want to believe in the factual truth of the story of Christ, if only because they have made it the foundation of their religious faith. But, on the other hand, those, be they many or few, who care enough about religion to care whether it is true, know, or may know, that the truth or falsehood of the story of Christ can only be decided by historical investigation; and, knowing that, those who have the profoundest sense of what religion means will prefer, I think, to rest it on the immediate experience of life, rather than on the result of inquiries into a remote and uncertain past.

The readers who have gone with me so far I will now ask to go a step further. Supposing

that we have handed over to science all questions of historical fact, does there remain some other kind of truth which may be held to be communicable by revelation? 'Yes,' it will be replied, 'there remain what are really the most important truths of religion: the existence and nature of God and His relation to the world.' Let us proceed, then, to consider these. And, in the first place, let us note that, as a matter of fact, in the case of Christianity, as of the other great historical religions, the truth in question is intimately bound up with that factual truth which we have suggested must be relegated to the court of science. Christians believe that God exists, that He has such and such a character, and that He cares about and directs the world, primarily because they believe that Jesus Christ existed and taught in the manner recorded. So far, then, as the doctrines of Christian theology depend upon these facts, they stand or fall, if the position I have put forward be accepted, by the verdict of history. I will suppose, however, that it is urged that there is a direct revelation of theological truth, a revelation which may be confirmed, but cannot be shaken, by history, and which is communicated somehow to some special

sense, so as not to be reducible to a department of science.

This revelation may be supposed to be communicated either to an individual mind or to a Church. But the revelation to a Church must, I suppose, be conceived to rest originally upon revelation to individuals. It is the latter, therefore, as the more fundamental, which I shall consider. And I shall proceed straight to what appears to be the fundamental question: What are the marks by which a revelation is recognised, and which lead a man to separate off a certain set of his convictions, and say that they were arrived at by a route, and represent a kind of certainty, different from all others?

The answer to this question ought clearly to be given by one who is conscious of possessing this special avenue to truth, not by one who, like myself, is aware that he does not possess it. Judging, however, from what has been said on the subject by those professing to have experience, and from what appear to be the general possibilities of the case, I venture to suggest that revelation can only be conceived in one of two ways: either as an immediate intuition conveyed in what is regarded as a moment of supernormal

perception; or as the gradually garnered result of the normal experience of life. I shall consider each of these possibilities in turn.

And, first, with regard to the intuition of the exceptional moment. It is, of course, indisputable that such experiences occur, and are conceived by those who receive them to be communications of absolute truth; the familiar phenomenon of 'conversion' is a case in point. But, for our present purpose, the important question is whether the belief of the recipient in the evidential value of the experience is justified; and I think that a little consideration will show that it is not. For it is noticeable that the truth supposed to be revealed in the moment of conversion is commonly, if not invariably, the reflection of the doctrine or theory with which the subject, whether or no he has accepted it, has hitherto been most familiar. I have never heard, for example, of a case in which a Mohammedan or a Hindoo, without having ever heard of Christianity, has had a revelation of Christian truth; or even of a case of the conversion in this way to Roman Catholicism of one who has been brought up an Evangelical, or *vice versâ*. Conversion, in fact, it would seem, is not the communica-

tion of a new truth; it is the presentation of ideas already familiar in such a way that they are accompanied by an irresistible certainty that they are true. But this sense of certainty may attach to any kind of intellectual content. If a man has been brought up a Christian, he will be converted to a belief in Christ; if he has been trained as a Hindoo, he will receive the vision of the Absolute; if he is optimistic by temperament, he will have a revelation that the world is good; if pessimistic, it will be borne in upon him that it is bad. All of these revelations cannot be true. One may be true and the others false. But in that case we must find our criterion of truth and falsehood somewhere else than in the subjective certainty of the converted person. And that this must be so will be even more clear when we reflect that, so far as the element of subjective certainty is concerned, a religious revelation cannot be distinguished from what would be admitted to be the hallucinations of disease. There is no idea in a person's mind which may not, under the appropriate conditions, become an *idée fixe*, and substitute itself, in the consciousness of the patient, for what is commonly taken to be reality. A man may be convinced

with equal assurance that he is a poached egg or a saint; that he has a mission to assassinate the King or to redeem the world; that he is eternally damned or eternally saved; that he has had a vision of the Virgin Mary or a vision of Nirvana. I do not suggest that there is no distinction in truth and value between the various ideas that may thus be imposed by moments of emotional excitement upon different minds—that the visions, say, of St. Francis are not more important than those of Marie Alacoque, or the conversion of St. Paul than that of a dipsomaniac in the Salvation Army. But it is indisputable that the test of validity must be sought somewhere else than in the sense of certainty felt by the person who claims to have had the revelation. In other words, the truth of a doctrine supposed to be thus conveyed, or the goodness of a moral intuition, must be sifted, before they can be accepted, by the ordinary critical processes; and, except as the result of such a sifting, performed deliberately and again and again, in calm and normal moments, no man who is at once religious, honest, and intelligent, will or ought to accept the deliverances of any so-called revelation of this type. But to admit this is to admit that we

reject revelation as a basis of religion; if, that is, revelation be conceived as the direct communication of truth in a moment of supernormal, or, as is just as likely to be the case, of infranormal experience.

But if revelation be not so conceived, how is it to be conceived? Many people who have experience of religion would, I think, reply somewhat as follows:

'We received originally—on authority, if you like—a certain doctrine which also commended itself to our affections—the doctrine, in brief, which we conceive to contain the essence of Christianity: that there is a God who loves us as a Father loves His children; that Jesus Christ is His son; that He lived upon earth and died upon the cross; that His death is the assurance of our redemption; and that that redemption is gradually working itself out under His immediate direction in the course of the history of the world and of individual lives. Further, we believe that souls are immortal, and are destined —those of them, at least, who are saved—to enter into eternal bliss. The doctrine thus received we have carried with us through the experience of life; and, if once we believed it on authority, we

believe it now because we have found that it works. At moments of trouble we have had recourse to it, and have not found it to fail us. We have proved it to be progressively capable of interpreting experience. And when we say that it is "revealed," what we mean is that, though we could never have arrived at it by the unaided operation of the reason, yet, once it was given us, we tested and found it to be true. We cannot, indeed, prove it by the intelligence, but we have proved it by life; and, though its source be super-rational, in its operation it has shown itself to be reasonable.'

I do not know whether, in this brief statement, I have done justice to the position of those whom I respect as at once the most religious and most rational of Christians. But I have endeavoured to do so; and I must now indicate what I conceive to be the intellectual weakness of the position, without questioning its efficacy as a rule of life.

And, first, I must point out that the view I have indicated depends, in part at least, on the assumption that the story of the Gospel is true. But that, I have urged, is a matter that can be determined only by historical criticism, and about

which it is hardly to be expected that such criticism will ever attain to certainty. No experience of life can affect the conclusion one way or the other. Either Christ existed, and was as described, or He did not. And the truth on this subject cannot be modified by the fact that it is possible to weave about His recorded history an eminently consolatory and helpful scheme of life. Further, with regard to the other elements of the doctrine—the existence and nature of God and the immortality of the soul—these, though in the Christian scheme they are closely connected with the belief in Christ, are no doubt capable of being held independently. But, even so, in what sense can they be said to be 'revealed'? The fact that they afford a solution of the riddle of the world which to many minds is satisfactory does not in itself show anything about their truth or falsehood. It shows merely the tremendous bias under which criticism has to act. The belief in what is called revelation is, I fear, in such an instance as this, only a reflection of the intense need to believe. But such need can be no guarantee of truth, though it may be the most fruitful impulse in the search for truth. Here, too, the fact that the belief works is no evidence

of its validity, but only of its efficacy. Its validity can only be tested by the ordinary processes of criticism. And this is a fact which it will, I cannot but think, become increasingly impossible for the most religious and the most candid minds to deny. There is no general presumption that what is helpful and good is also true. We may desire, and rightly, that it should be so; and that desire may be, as I believe it is, the main stimulus in our search for truth. But it cannot be more; and it is, I feel sure, to the interest of religion, as well as of science, that this should be recognised as soon and as widely as possible.

This must conclude what I had to say on the subject of revelation. Revelation, I have suggested, in proportion as men become honest, educated, and intelligent, will cease to be regarded as a satisfactory basis for religion; for it will be increasingly recognised not to be an avenue to truth. And if, so far, I have carried my readers with me, I will ask them to proceed with me to the further question: Granting that revelation must be set aside, does religion disappear with it? Or does the ordinary experience of life evoke and justify some point of view which may properly be called religious?

In attempting an answer to this question, it will be useful, I think, to call attention to a feature which is common to all the great religions, and which differentiates them, on the one hand, from mere philosophical theories of the universe, and, on the other, from mere ethical systems. The point I have in mind is that they combine in a close and indissoluble union two things which logically are quite distinct—namely, first, propositions about the nature of the world and man's relation to it; secondly, statements of values, of objects which ought to be pursued, and ought to give rise, perhaps do give rise, to passionate aspiration. Thus, on the one hand, in providing a system of the universe, they bring it into close connection with life by associating it with ideals; and, on the other, in recommending ideals, they immensely enhance their attractive force by postulating that they can and will be realized in actual existence. But the elements which are thus closely associated in religion are, as I have said, logically distinct. A sound and true perception in the region of ideals may be accompanied by ignorance and misconception in the region of fact, and *vice versâ*. And this, I think, is what has happened in the case of the great religions.

Take, for instance, Christianity. It is commonly, and, I think, rightly, credited with embodying moral values of profound and singular importance, such, for example, as the brotherhood of man; and, on the other hand, intellectually, its whole system of fact, its cosmology and theology, is, to say the least, inadequate. The story of the Garden of Eden, of the apple and the serpent, of the Fall, of the penalty incurred, not by Adam and Eve merely, but by the whole human race, of the Atonement by a vicarious sacrifice, of the two societies, the World and the Church, pursuing through history, side by side, their diverse destiny, the one to eternal damnation, the other to eternal blessedness—all this is mere mythology, and mythology not of the most edifying kind. But originally, it must always be remembered, this mythology was seriously put forward, not as a metaphor or symbol, but as matter of fact, by the man who, more than anyone else, laid the foundation of Christian theology. It was accepted as matter of fact by the Church. And if now, as I suppose is very largely the case, it is interpreted as mere allegory, that very fact only illustrates the point I wish to make, that a religion which embodies profound moral intuitions may associate them with

views about the universe so inadequate and crude that subsequent generations have no choice but to interpret them as symbolism. There is thus an inherent instability in the great religions, due to the fact that their prophets, commonly men of unique moral insight, have associated their moral teaching with theories about the world based upon no proper method of inquiry, and unable to meet the first brunt of intelligent criticism.

And this brings me to the conclusion at which I am driving. If the whole development of the human mind in the last few centuries is not to be reversed, if we are not to relapse into intellectual barbarism, it will become increasingly impossible for any theory about the constitution of the world and the meaning of human destiny to be accepted, which does not rest explicitly upon the basis of science and philosophy, and is not amenable to, and competent to sustain, their criticism. In other words, it is not, and cannot be, the function of religion to proclaim truths about the general structure of the universe, or to affirm that this or that Being does or does not exist. And the frank recognition of this fact implies that, whatever religion may be in the future, it will be, unless all the intellectual heritage of the world is to be lost,

something very different from what it has been in the past.

Let us turn now to the other aspect of religion, that whereby it embodies statements of moral values. These are not necessarily affected by the truth or falsehood of the cosmological ideas with which they have been associated. And, in the future, as in the past, there will be, one may anticipate and hope, men of profound intuition in these matters, who will deliver their message to the world. The main difference that may be anticipated in the attitude of men towards the teacher will be that they will no longer regard him as a person radically different from themselves, as a God or the Son of God, nor conceive his message to have a final, exhaustive, and infallible significance; but, rather, will recognise him to be a man like themselves, only more finely endowed, and will know that it is their duty, as it will be the duty of those who succeed them, not merely passively to accept, but in appropriating, to sift and to test the gospel he announces. They will regard him, in brief, as a poet, a saint, a practical reformer, and value and follow him accordingly, up to the measure of his merits and of their lights.

Now, granting all this, as I believe it will be granted by the readers whom I have in view, will there or will there not, under these conditions, be any place left for anything that ought properly to be called religion? I believe that there will, and a very important one. There will still be an interaction, though no longer a fusion, between our conception of the world and our ideals. The former, indeed, we shall then take, probably in a very tentative form, from science and philosophy; the latter we shall affirm on the warrant of our own perception, and not necessarily with less conviction than before. But, in some form or other, we shall have both; and religion will consist in the passionate apprehension, not merely by the intellect but by the imagination, of the nature, as we conceive it, of the world as a whole, and of our place in it, regarded from the point of view of our ideals. But the further elaboration of this position I must leave to the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

RELIGION

In the preceding chapter I gave reasons that seem to me to necessitate the rejection of revelation, in any sense of the term which I have been able to imagine, as an avenue to truth, and therefore as a basis for religion. I suggested, however, that religion would remain, even if we rejected revelation, and even, as I am now inclined to add, all the more because we have rejected it. For religion, in the view of it which I now wish to develop, is a reaction of the highest imagination of the best men upon life and the world, so far as we know them by experience and science—a passionate apprehension, from the point of view of ideals, of the general situation in which we find ourselves.

That situation, in essentials, has not been changed by all the developments of history; and I will venture briefly to describe it as follows.

We find ourselves born without choice of our own into a universe which we do not understand, and which corresponds, as it seems, only in the most imperfect and fragmentary way with those of our desires and aspirations which we believe to be legitimate and good. From this universe we are removed, as we entered it, without notice or warning, and without any reference to our willingness or unwillingness to depart—

> 'Without asking, hither hurried whence?
> And, without asking, whither hurried hence?'

Before departing, we have, commonly, without much reflection, produced others to undergo in their turn the same enigmatic destiny. And so from generation to generation the race is continued, achieving much, yet accomplishing nothing; learning much, yet remaining ignorant of everything; acting, thinking, feeling, yet haunted by the doubt whether it is not all a dream; pursuing Good and contending with Evil in a scheme of things which never appears itself to take sides; developing the means to happiness, yet never becoming happier; pressing ever onward to goals that are never reached;

and retiring, section after section, baffled but never acknowledging defeat, to make room for new combatants in the contest that is always old.

Such, or somewhat such, is the situation. And it is in an attitude of the spirit towards this situation that the essence of religion, I would suggest, consists; not in opinions held about it, nor in the intellectual content of beliefs—these may be of almost any character without thereby becoming or ceasing to be religious—but in the imaginative perception and feeling of the issue, however it be interpreted. It is not, in a word, the doctrine that makes religion, it is the spirit; and the spirit may inspire the most diverse and contradictory doctrines. This is expressed for the modern world better than I have found it expressed elsewhere, in the following passage of Maeterlinck:

'Je puis croire d'une manière religieuse et infinie qu'il n'y a pas de Dieu, que mon apparition n'a pas de but hors d'elle-même, que l'existence de mon âme n'est plus nécessaire à l'économie de ce monde sans limites que les nuances éphémères d'une fleur; vous pouvez croire petitement qu'un Dieu unique et tout-puissant vous aime et vous protège; je serai plus heureux et plus calme que vous, si mon incertitude est plus grande.

plus grave et plus noble que votre foi, si elle a interrogé plus intimement mon âme, si elle a fait le tour d'un horizon plus étendu, si elle a aimé plus de choses. Le Dieu auquel je ne crois pas deviendra plus puissant et plus consolateur que celui auquel vous croyez, si j'ai mérité que mon doute repose sur des pensées et sur des sentiments plus vastes et plus purs que ceux qui animent votre certitude. Encore une fois, croire, ne pas croire, cela n'a guère d'importance ; ce qui en a, c'est la loyauté, l'étendue, le désintéressement et la profondeur des raisons pour lesquelles on croit ou pour lesquelles on ne croit point.'

Is truth, then, indifferent? Not at all! But—and this is what we must learn to accept—religion cannot teach us what is true. Only perception, and inference, and logic, only, in the broadest sense, science—under which, for the moment, I will ask to be allowed to include philosophy—can teach us anything about the constitution of the universe and our own place in it; can teach us whether or no there be anything corresponding with what we have called God; whether or no the individual soul survives death; whether or no the process of things moves towards a good end. These are, to my mind, questions of supreme importance. But I do not think that the existence or the value of religion depends

upon the answer we may be able to give them, although its character must be determined by that answer.

Let me illustrate my meaning by examples. Suppose a man to have accepted—as many now have, provisionally at least—the view which seems to be suggested by modern science: that the world as a whole is neither good nor bad, but simply indifferent to moral values; that the life of mankind is but a brief and insignificant episode in its strictly determined but purposeless activity; that it tends to no goal having ethical significance, still less to one corresponding to our conceptions of Good—suppose a man to have accepted this, is he therefore debarred from religion? Surely not. On the contrary, there would seem to be open to him two attitudes at least, either of which he will adopt, according to his character, if he has the religious instinct at all, and either of which may be fairly called religious. Thus he may, adhering passionately to our standards of value (none the less true because their realization is so imperfect and precarious), pursue, wherever it flees, the perishing image of Good, imprisoning it in a rule or a policy, impressing it on a fugitive act, embodying

it in the flux of feeling, reflecting it in the mirror of art, always from the consciousness of frustration drawing new vigour for the chase, snatching defiance from the sense of defeat, patience from the fire of passion, from the very indifference of the universe gathering the inspiration to contend with it, and, though at last he be broken, perishing unsubdued, weaker yet greater than the blind world which, though it made him and destroyed, was incapable of understanding or valuing its own creation. Such a man, sustained by such a conviction, honestly held, I should call religious. And if to some he should appear rather to be blasphemous, that will be only because they do not share what I have supposed to be his intellectual position. Granting a bad or indifferent world, to defy it would be a form of religion. But not the only possible form, even on that hypothesis. For where one man practises defiance, another may practise renunciation; and the conviction that Good cannot be realized, or can be realized, if at all, only in connection with greater Evil, may lead to the creed of the annihilation of desire, instead of the affirmation of will. Escape, not battle, then becomes the goal, as in the Buddhist faith, and the philosophy of

Schopenhauer and Hartmann. And this attitude, too, will be religious, if it be greatly and imaginatively conceived—religious, not by virtue of its intellectual content, but by virtue of the sense of a world-issue turning upon the ideas of Good and Evil.

But, now, suppose a radically different scientific conception of the world. Suppose it to be believed that our ideas of Good and Evil are also those with which the universe is concerned; that it is moving towards a goal, and a goal of which we approve; that with it moves the human race, and even individual souls, surviving death, and ultimately entering into their perfection. On this view religion assumes a radically different complexion. It is optimistic instead of pessimistic; it has exchanged the horror of night for the midday sun. But it is still religion, for its essence is still the same—an imaginative conception of the universe as a whole in relation to Good and Evil.

Or, again, suppose that, to another man, science does not appear to justify any attitude towards the universe as a whole except that of agnosticism; suppose he feels that he does not know, that no one really knows, what is the relation of our ideals to the world; whether or no they are

destined for any complete and permanent realization; whether or no there is any significance in individual lives other than that which appears on the surface. Still, if his imagination and his feeling be profound, he is not debarred from religion—a religion not of sunshine or darkness, but of the starry twilight, tremulous with hopes and fears, wistful, adventurous, passionate, divining a horizon more mysterious and vast than day or night can suggest, from uncertainty conjuring possibility, from doubt evoking inspiration, and passing through life as a man may float down an unknown river in the dusk, risking and content to risk his fortune and his life on the chance of a discovery more wonderful even than the most audacious of his dreams.

Enough, perhaps, has been said to bring out the point I wish to make, one, as I believe, of the very first importance to all who care at once for religion and for truth. Truth is matter of science, religion of imagination and feeling. It is possible to have truth without having religion, and *vice versâ*. But if a man have religion, its character, if he be intelligent and sincere, will necessarily depend on what he believes to be truth. He will not imagine that religion implies

some special organ of knowledge, whether such organ be supposed to be the possession of all men as such, or of specially gifted individuals, or of a particular Church. He will never confuse his desires and his aspirations with his positive knowledge, even though he may think them more important than his knowledge. And he will be the less inclined to do this in proportion as he has come to see that, whatever be the truth, there must always be a place for religion, and a place perhaps the most important of all. But it is a poor religion that needs to rest upon falsehood or upon the deliberate refusal to face what we know of truth; that takes refuge in excitement, or in sophistry, or in deliberately induced subjective hallucinations, from a truth which it fears may be fatal to itself. Religion is an attitude of the imagination and the will, not of the intellect. But from the intellect it receives its light; and its discipline will be the more arduous, its insight the more profound, the more candidly it accepts all that the intellect can communicate. It is possible, it is common, to believe in God, without having religion; it is less common, but it is not less possible, to have religion without believing in God.

Such, then, stated briefly, is what I conceive to be the real relation of religion to truth. I do not know that I could better explain my view by further elaboration; and I will therefore proceed to another point, perhaps not less important. I will endeavour to set forth the relation of religion, in my sense of the term, to the other ideal activities of man—to morals, that is, and to art. And, first, with regard to morals. The statement that conduct depends upon religion is very often made, and there may be, in some sense, some truth in it; but in what sense, and what truth, is not so easy to determine. I will, however, endeavour to make certain distinctions which I think are important. A great part of conduct—the whole conduct, perhaps, of most people—is purely habitual. It appears to depend neither on religion, nor on any conscious conviction, either of the intellect or of the imagination. Men act as they do, in this the more common case, because they cannot help it, because they have always done so, because others about them do so. Economic necessities, imitation, public opinion—which itself is the result of these factors—are the determining considerations. It is, however, sometimes maintained that habitual

action of this type depends also upon another element; that really, though indirectly, it is determined by religion; for that the fact of a Church in the background, with its organization, its services, its sacraments, acts, if in no other way, yet as a kind of screen, shutting out from the horizon of practicability all sorts of anarchic and anti-social conduct which otherwise would naturally suggest itself to the imagination, and might then naturally issue in action. This is a contention which I have already discussed in dealing with what I have called ecclesiasticism. It is very hard, I think, to say whether there is any, or how much, truth in it. But if there be any, then, so far, it must be admitted that even habitual and mechanical conduct depends, in the last resort, not, indeed, on personal religious conviction, but on the existence, in the society, if not of religion, at least of religious organization. Supposing, however, that such organization is developed on the lines of ecclesiasticism, I have given my reasons for believing that the harm it does outweighs the possible good. The proper way to make and keep men moral is to help them to conditions of life in which morality would be possible, and in which it would be backed and

supported by intelligence. Good conduct based on mere habit sustained by the authority of a Church is at the best a *pis aller;* and the necessity which may be held to justify it is one which also condemns the society that cannot exist without recourse to it.

But, further, there is a certain amount of conduct which may be said to be based upon reason; by which I mean that it may depend, in part at least, upon the deliberate and conscious acceptance of a certain end — such, for example, as the greatest happiness of the greatest number; and upon the attempt to act in such a way as will tend to bring about that end. Even in such cases the conduct, I think, is really far more habitual than would be admitted by those who adopt the position. They act, in fact, much as other people act; but they believe that the rules to which they are accustomed, and to which they instinctively conform, are such as will contribute, if duly observed, to the goal they have in view. And, no doubt, in the case supposed, they are, partly at least, right; for customary action has grown up under the stress of felt, if not formulated, purposes, of which one at least has been the survival and the welfare of society. Conduct

of this kind I should describe as rational; but it does not necessarily imply religious conviction. A man pursuing it need not have any passion for the good end he has set before himself; he may have merely an intellectual conviction that it is good; as, indeed, I think is commonly the case with those who profess utilitarianism. Still less need he have any imaginative conception of the universe as a whole, and of the relation to it of our ideals. In such cases, conduct, I think, clearly does not depend in any sense upon religion; and, for aught I know, in some society of the future conduct of this kind may be the general rule.

I hardly, however, think that this is probable. The religious instinct is, I believe, too deeply rooted ever to disappear; and wherever and whenever it subsists as a genuine impulse, in individuals or in societies, it cannot help reacting profoundly upon morals. Indeed, if we look historically at the development of conduct, we find that the great moral reformers have been men of religious genius; that Buddha, Jesus Christ, Saint Francis, were, first, religious teachers, and, secondly, only teachers of morals. Indeed, a profound ethical intuition would seem necessarily to depend on a profound religious insight. For

the best man is he who loves good for its own sake, and pursues it in a reasonable way. But to pursue it reasonably is to pursue it with an intelligence of its place in the universe, and not merely an intelligence, but a passionate apprehension. So that moral genius depends upon religious genius, and therefore, since it must be affected by anything that affects religion, will be affected by the deliverances of science about the world.

From this analysis, imperfect as it is, it would seem to follow that, though it be true that the great mass of conduct is based rather upon habits than upon conviction, yet even these habits grew up in connection with religion, and perhaps cannot subsist indefinitely without a new religious baptism; and that the great reformations in morals have been originated by men of religious genius, upon the stream of which they have, as it were, been floated. Afterwards, no doubt, they are left high and dry, like sea-weed on the rocks; but, then, like it, they are deprived of their proper element. Only the flooding of the tide can restore them to their true and native life, lift and expand and set them to sparkle and gleam with a thousand colours, or, it may be, sweep them away and plant new seeds, to produce in

their time a new and radiant foliage. We can and we do, most of us, for the most part, act without religion; but such action is the action of machines. Religion is the spirit and the life; and in that sense, a very profound one, religion may be said to be the basis of conduct.

Thus, briefly, of the relation of religion to conduct; I turn now to consider its relation to art. And here I may be met, at the outset, by the contention that there is no such relation at all. For artists, or at least modern artists, are urgent in their repudiation of the dependence of their art upon anything but itself; and I presume that, so far as their own inspiration is concerned, they are right. Art is now very largely a not too sincere hobby of the rich, a matter of drawing-room decoration, of fashion, of conversation over tea, or, what is really most important, of pecuniary speculation. In the best cases, where the artist at least is genuine, it is a creation of beautiful things for the love of beauty, without reference to any view of life as a whole, or any place to be filled by its products in the corporate activities of society. And it is thus, perhaps, that artists at all times have most commonly regarded their art. But there have been exceptions. There have been, it seems, men

who have been profoundly inspired by the view of art first formulated, so far as I know, by Aristotle: that beauty is the end set before herself by Nature, an end which she realizes so far as the limitations of matter permit, but which it is reserved for the artist to bring to full perfection, his work being thus the fulfilment of her ideal. And if in this view Nature be conceived as herself the minister of God, art will become a religious activity—as indicated, for example, in the following lines of Michael Angelo:

> 'So, all the lovely things we find on earth
> Resemble, for the soul that rightly sees,
> That Source of bliss divine which gave us birth:
> Nor have we first-fruits or remembrances
> Of heaven elsewhere.'*

I have thought it worth while to refer, in passing, to this conception of art; but I do not wish to lay undue stress upon it. It is, perhaps, exceptional for an artist to pursue art in a religious spirit. What, however, is true and important is that, in the two greatest periods of European art, the Greek and the Italian, art was used and inspired by religion. And it would, I think, be

* Sonnet 54 in Symonds' translation.

unhistorical to deny that the perfection it attained in those periods was connected with the definite purpose, the limitations, the unity of aim, imposed by the end to which it was made subservient. However that may be, there can be no doubt that, for the votary who is sensitive both to religion and art, both gain indefinitely by their association with one another. For him, without art religion is dumb; and without religion art, if it is not insignificant, lacks at least the highest significance of which it is capable.

It may be worth while, in illustration of this point, to remind the reader of the various ways in which art has been made, and perhaps might be made again, contributory to religion. First, as architecture, it has raised the material habitation of the Divine, and in doing so has reflected, I think, by a perhaps unconscious symbolism, the forms in which that Divine has been conceived. Surely, at least, one might question whether the difference between a classical temple and a Gothic church is to be attributed only to a difference of climate, or of technical skill and tradition. It would be a curiously happy chance, if it were merely chance, that made the house destined for the abode of one of the bright Olympians a palace

of gleaming marble set on a hill by the sea, perfect in form, brilliant in colour, a jewel to reflect the sun and the sky, a harp for the winds to play upon, an incarnation of the spirit of the open air, of the daylight and of the blue heaven; while, for the mysterious Jehovah and the God-Man His Son, there rose into gray and weeping skies huge emblems of the cross, crowned with towers aspiring to a heaven unexplored, and arched over huge spaces where the eye is lost in the gloom, where form is dissolved in vagueness, and the white light of day, rejected in its purity, is permitted to pass only upon condition that it depicts in sombre colours the pageant of the life of the soul. That architecture has, whether by chance or no, a symbolic value, as well as one purely and simply æsthetic, will not, I think, be disputed by those who are sensitive to such impressions; and, so regarded, architecture has been, and might be again, one of the chief expressions of religion.

But not the only one; for, within the temple or the church, art, in its greatest period, was used to illustrate the legends and the ideals of the faith. Such illustration ranged from the crudest story-telling, devoid of all æsthetic significance, to

works in which symbolism was amalgamated inseparably with artistic beauty. In the Greek temple was throned the statue of the god, the perfection, on the one hand, of form, of handling, of surface, of all that which to the artist makes art; and, on the other, what for the layman will always and rightly be more important, a symbol at once of the physical ideal of the human form, and of that particular aspect of the life of man of which the deity represented was the type. And so, again, in the Christian Church were expressed, in colour and form, not only æsthetic beauty, but those various phases of the spiritual life of which the Christian religion takes account, the ideal of redemption by suffering, of maternity, of asceticism, of charity, expressed in and through the legends of the founder of the religion and of the saints. In this way religion became articulate. No longer a mere matter of feeling, it confronted man as an object, and only so, perhaps, can it reach its full development. Protestantism, in purifying its inner life, has gone far towards destroying its outward form. But without expression, and expression in choice and deliberate form, religious, like other feeling, tends to become stagnant, sour, and corrupt. It needs

the open air, it needs communion and interchange; and this it can only receive in the finest form through the mediation of art.

But it is perhaps in ritual that that mediation reaches its highest power. Ritual is, or should be, a product of two of the greatest arts, literature and music, with the assistance, perhaps, of an element of drama. No emotion so poignant and profound can, I think, be produced, no 'purgation' so sanctifying be effected, by any other means at our disposal. The effect even of a ritual which we do not understand, or with which we are not, intellectually, in touch, may be immense upon a sensitive spirit. How much more that of one which should really and adequately express our conviction and feeling about life and the world! For those who can accept the Christian view, the Christian ritual must be their most precious possession; but for those who cannot—and they are, as I believe, an increasing number of not the least religious souls—their lack of intellectual assent to the faith weakens or even nullifies the effect of the symbol. And if, as I think will be the case, the men in whom the religious instinct is strongest move farther and farther from the Christian postulates, a ritual which shall

express their new attitude will become, perhaps is already, one of the chief spiritual needs. But a ritual cannot be invented; antiquity appears to be of the essence of its power—though, to be sure, rituals must have had a beginning!—and, as experiment shows, it is difficult to take seriously any new attempt in this direction. Perhaps, therefore, there is a better prospect for the modern world in the development of art towards religion than in that of religion towards art. Something of this kind, it is clear, was the idea of Wagner. And without raising here what may be a point of somewhat acrimonious dispute, whether any of his operas can appropriately be called religious, there can be no doubt that there might be a music-drama that would be such, if the man who conceived it were himself religious. The drama of Æschylus is, of course, a convincing historical example; and so is such a medieval play as 'Everyman.' Such drama, I cannot but think, is the highest form of æsthetic production. And, while nothing can be further from my purpose than to enter upon the not very fruitful controversy as to the proper function of art, I may perhaps be permitted to record my own feeling that never have its wonder-

ful resources, especially in the region of music, been more wantonly squandered than in this generation; and that only their deliberate dedication to what, say what men may, is at bottom always their most serious pre-occupation, so soon as they have any spiritual pre-occupations at all—I mean the significance of their life in the whole scheme of the world—nothing but such a dedication will rescue art from triviality, or restore life to the dignity of which it is capable.

Such, then, in brief are what I conceive to be the relations of religion to the other ideal activities of men—to science, conduct, and art. And of these, I have suggested, the most important is the relation to science, because upon science depends logically not the existence, but the content of religion. For religion, in the view I have put forward, is concerned with the place of our ideals in the structure of the universe. And that place it cannot itself determine; it must wait for the determination of the intellect. But on that point the intellect has as yet been unable with certainty to determine anything; and consequently religion tends to assume different characters, according to the way in which different people tend to estimate

the situation under the influence of their temperamental or intellectual bias. The advent of positive and conclusive knowledge would put an end to such differences; and, however improbable it may now seem that such knowledge should ever be attainable, it would be a foolish credulity to deny the possibility or to discourage the quest of it.

Religion so conceived is, of course, a very different thing from that which purports to offer a special revelation of truth on the very points which I am assuming to be still unknown. Many religious people, caring more for their religion than for the truth, will no doubt continue to believe that there is such a revelation. But, though they will have more assurance, and it may be more peace, they will not necessarily have more religion—and they may easily have less—than those who candidly recognise the claims of intellect. Their road through life will be simpler, but their knowledge of the land will be more limited, and their range of emotion proportionately restricted. Religion is not a creed, it is a growing experience; and the experience is necessarily narrowed by anything that narrows the intellectual horizon.

If I may conclude with a parable, we are all travellers through an unknown country. The majority, I think, at all times journey with their eyes on the ground, following the track of necessity and custom in which their feet were set from the beginning, looking neither to the right nor to the left, but at most backward or forward, and learning nothing, nor caring to learn, about the country through which they pass, whether it is mountainous or level, fed with rivers or dry, inhabited or solitary, lit by sun or moon or glimmering stars. These are the men without religion, those who plod in blinkers, as secure and unperplexed as it is possible for men to be when at any moment the ground beneath their feet may open and swallow them up.

Others there are—those who believe in some revealed religion—whose eyes are directed not down, but straight before them, following a beam of light that springs from a sun still below the horizon, but one, as they believe, which is about to rise. So dazzling is this beam that the land all about it appears to be shrouded in thick darkness. Only in the path of the light is anything to be seen, where it illumines a mountain-top, gleams on a far river, or gilds what perhaps may

be the distant sea. Thither the travellers hasten, without fear or doubt, counting as nothing the hardships of the road in their certainty of the consummation.

But, again, there are others who see no such light to follow, but who yet refuse to walk in the beaten track. Desiring, not merely to pass through, but to explore the strange land, they look freely above, beneath, around them, in an uncertain glimmer of starlight often obscured by clouds. All about them are dangers which they note but cannot gauge, formless terrors, inexplicable sounds, stirrings, ambushes, contacts. But also, here and there, are suggestions of unutterable promise—an unexpected clearing in a wood, a footprint or a sign left by some friendly traveller gone before, pale flowers beside a brook, the note of a nightingale, a peak of snow like a cloud in the sky, the rising of a new star, and always the tremulous hope, 'In the east is there not a crystal gleam? does not a violet lustre begin to burn upon the gray? does not the planet hanging there throb more passionate and pale? The sun we saw set, will he not rise again?'

These latter it is who have the religion of agnosticism; by which I mean, not a conviction

that knowledge is impossible, but an uncertainty as to what may be its deliverance—an uncertainty, not of indifference, but of sensitive, passionate desire. Only the advent of knowledge can put an end to that uncertainty, can dash or confirm the audacities of hope, dissipate or establish the forebodings of fear. One way or other by knowledge the character of religion will be determined. But, in either case, religion will still be possible, and, for those who possess the instinct, necessary. What depends upon knowledge is not religion; it is approbation or condemnation of the world. That issue we cannot shirk; we can only settle it, if at all, by science; and the attempt to find in revelation a short-cut to the solution does but divert our efforts from the only fruitful method of inquiry.

CHAPTER IV

FAITH

In the preceding chapters I have attempted to state my view as to the relation of religion to knowledge. Religion, I have said, does not give us truth. And as this statement to some of my readers may have seemed paradoxical, I propose here further to explain what, in my opinion, is the relation of religion, and in particular of what is sometimes called 'faith,' to knowledge.

My point, perhaps, may be put most clearly thus: If a man says 'Religion gives me truth,' I would reply, 'Then why not call it knowledge?' For truth, though it be truth about God, is still truth; and truth that is known is part of knowledge. But there is only one method of knowledge, viz., experience, and legitimate inference from experience. Theology, therefore, if it is a branch of knowledge, must differ from other branches, not in its method, but in its object.

If we know the truth about God, that truth is scientific, in the broad and proper sense of the term. It is arrived at by a method which can be explained and criticised, and it is subject to constant revision as experience develops and intellectual capacity increases.

This much, I dare say, would be admitted, perhaps even eagerly asserted, by many theologians. My next point takes me into a more difficult region. What, I would ask, is the kind of experience on which knowledge about God and other objects of religious belief can claim to be based?

There would seem to be two possible answers, not incompatible with one another. First, the experience may be historical. It may depend on a record of the past. And such record is, of course, part of the theoretical basis of Christianity. On this point I have nothing to add to what I said in a previous chapter. Historical truth must be ascertained by historical methods. But it is my own personal opinion that such methods will never give us the kind of certainty which has hitherto attached in practice to religious beliefs; and that men will become increasingly unwilling and unable to base their

scheme of life on data and inferences of that kind.

I pass, therefore, to a position which seems to me to have more importance for the future. 'Whatever,' it may be said, 'be the deliverance of history, there is, quite apart from that, in the direct experience of men, a perception of the Being we call God.' Such a statement is one of the most interesting and important that could be made, if it be made sincerely. But it is pre-eminently one that ought to be challenged. And that, partly because of its importance; partly because of the indefiniteness that attaches to the word 'God'; partly because of the probable complexity of the assertion that is in form so simple. For, if a man says, 'I know God by direct experience,' what is it he knows, and how? Has he had a 'vision'? Possibly! Such visions do occur. But in themselves they prove nothing. Everything depends on whether or no there is any real object corresponding to them. And that is a matter for scientific inquiry. Probably, however, visions of this kind are not what is meant. When a man says he has a direct knowledge of God, he will probably mean that he has a sense, somehow, that there does exist a Being who is

good, and loving, and powerful, and wise beyond all experience of ours. Such a sense, I suppose, many people do have, genuinely and constantly. And there is no reason *a priori* why it should not correspond to a reality. But, once more, whether it does correspond or no is a matter for science. The sense in question, if it is to yield knowledge, must be analysed and tested by a very complicated and difficult process. And I cannot doubt that, were such an analysis to be made, the original and apparently simple impression would be found to include a number of heterogeneous elements—elements of tradition, elements of desire, elements of inference. Thus, the man's idea of God will surely be derived, partly from the religion in which he has been brought up, partly from his own reflections upon life and the world; and, almost certainly, it will have been affected by his needs and desires, by what he profoundly wants to be true. And, as soon as this analysis has been made, it will become clear that the single and apparently simple sense or impression which he calls his direct experience of God has no more validity as a deliverance of truth than the elements of which it is composed. If truth is to be elicited from it, the tradition must be sifted, the infer-

ences tested; and above all, the element of desire ruled out as *prima facie* irrelevant; unless, indeed, and until it can be shown—as, for example, the new philosophy that calls itself 'pragmatism' endeavours to show—that truth is in some way determined by our desires. In other words, any truth that finally emerges from the process will be scientific or philosophic truth; and if it is to be called religious, should be called so only with relation to its objects, not to its method. And that is what I mean when I say that religion does not give us truth, but that truth is only given by science.

Now, I do not pretend to judge what may be the result of the kind of inquiries I have been suggesting above. It is by some such inquiries, in my opinion, that religious truth must be established, if it is to be established at all. But, meantime, it is, I think, true that religious questions are the kind of questions about which many serious and reflecting men do not, in fact, and will not, preserve an attitude merely of suspended judgment. Such men, I think, will prefer to describe their religious position as one of faith rather than of knowledge; and they will, perhaps, feel that it is foolish, and even pre-

sumptuous, to expect to attain to knowledge on such subjects. I have myself no sympathy with any attitude which limits *a priori* the possibilities of human endeavour. But, seeing that most men, for a long time, in proportion as they are candid, are likely to be intellectually agnostic on the most vital questions of religion, it seems to be important to try to ascertain in what sense faith may be legitimate, and what may be the relation of such faith to knowledge.

To avoid, so far as possible, all ambiguity, I wish to make it clear at the outset that, in using the word 'faith,' I do not wish it to carry all the meanings that attach to it in common usage. The word, for instance, is often used to imply a faculty which has the power to communicate, not only knowledge, but the most certain knowledge to which we can attain. It is not, of course, in that sense that I use the term, as will be clear from the preceding pages. When I speak here of faith, I speak of an attitude which is not primarily intellectual at all, and which is quite compatible with—nay, which depends upon—intellectual agnosticism; for it presupposes that, in the region to which it applies, we do not know. The attitude I would

describe is one of the emotions and the will—the laying hold, in the midst of ignorance, of a possibility that may be true, and directing our feeling and our conduct in accordance with it. In its broadest sense, I would say it is an emotional and volitional assumption that, somehow or other, in spite of appearances, things are all right. This general outline, of course, may be, and is, filled in by every and the most varied kind of content, according to the traditions in which men have been brought up, and the course and extent of their knowledge and experience. But very commonly it expresses itself in the form of what is called a 'belief in God'; an attitude, however, which does not imply any very definite nor any very uniform conception of God, but is apt, rather, to manifest itself negatively in a kind of distress if the existence of God is denied. And the root of that distress is, I think, the suggested inference that things are all wrong and not all right; or, to vary the phrase, one may perhaps say that faith involves a volitional assumption that things, whatever appearances may suggest, are really 'worth while.'

Now, if we had positive and complete know-

ledge on this point of 'worth-whileness'; if we knew, instead of merely conjecturing what may be, as we say, the 'meaning' of life; if we could see Good and Evil in their true and ultimate proportions, and finally sum up and judge the world; there would be no room and no possibility for any attitude of faith. Instead, we should have knowledge. But, in fact, our position is very different from this. We know that there is Evil, we know that there is Good; in some moods we may imagine that there is nothing but Evil, or nothing but Good; but, in sober truth, we cannot reasonably and finally, on grounds of knowledge, form a judgment about the 'worth-whileness' of life, because of the many important factors of which we are ignorant.

Thus, for example, many men feel, when it is put to them, that the question of the value of life depends very largely on the question whether individuals survive death; and, if they do, on the kind of life into which they pass. It is one kind of universe, they think, if death means annihilation; another kind if it means heaven or hell; another kind if it means a series of progressing lives, and so on.

Such possibilities, many people hold, are of

vital importance to us; and these people are apt, in the absence of knowledge, to adopt towards them an attitude, not merely of agnosticism, but also of what I have called faith. They select, that is, among the possibilities, that one which seems to them to give value to life, and concentrate about it their practical and emotional life. The attitude they thus adopt is different in its origin and effect from an attitude based upon knowledge. It is more precarious, more adventurous, more exciting, more liable to ups and downs. But it may be equally and even more efficacious upon life; and it is not, as I shall try to show, necessarily to be condemned as illegitimate.

There are others, again, to whom the fate of individuals after death is either a matter of indifference, or, as they may hold, has been finally settled by science. On this subject, therefore, they will have no faith. But they will almost certainly have faith on some subject. Probably, for example, they may cling to the idea of 'progress.' And that, although arguments may be adduced in its favour, is a doctrine so far from being established that acceptance of it is, I think, commonly the result rather of what

I am calling faith than of intellectual conviction.

Or, again, a man may be indifferent to the questions both of a survival of individuals after death and of the progress of the race, but may feel that the important point is the existence of God. People who feel this are, I suppose, commonly attached to one of the Churches. But there may be men not so attached to whom, nevertheless, a faith in God is the foundation of their life. It may be a personal God that they conceive; it may be a 'tendency in the universe'; it may be something which they prefer to call 'Earth' or 'Nature'; it may be an 'Absolute'; but, in any case, it is something not themselves and greater than themselves, something which, by its mere existence, makes everything supremely worth while, overrides and subsumes Evil, intensifies and universalizes Good, and concentrates and satisfies in itself those ideal impulses that otherwise would be broken and wasted about an imperfect self.

The various attitudes towards life thus briefly indicated, different though they be, are, nevertheless, all examples of what I am calling faith.

They all involve a volitional assumption, not based upon knowledge, as to the 'worth-whileness' of the universe; and their differences are differences as to what it is that constitutes 'worth-whileness.' If men should ever come, by thought and experience, nearer to an agreement on this point, their faiths are likely to approximate more than they do at present. But, meantime, the point I wish to make is, that faith, in some form or other, seems to be an almost necessary condition, if not of life, yet of the most fruitful and noble life. Almost necessary, I say. For there is a kind of pessimism which is nobler than most optimism; which is, so to speak, active in its character; and implies rather a passionate love of Good than an impotent despair about Evil. But that is a rare condition. And most men, I think, are significant, and find and make life significant, in proportion to their faith. Of the practical value of such faith there can, I think, be no doubt. The only question is whether, from the standpoint of knowledge, it is legitimate. For it must be remembered that the pursuit of truth is itself one of our highest practical activities; and that it must always be wrong to hamper or pervert that

pursuit by a predetermination that certain beliefs shall not be assailed. Faith, in a word can only be legitimate so long as it occupies a region not yet conquered by knowledge, and so long as it holds itself ready in a moment to yield its place so soon as knowledge arrives. Faith should stand always with the dagger of science pointed at its breast. It need not fear. It has its resurrections. And it, too, must be ready, if it would save its life, to lose it. On that condition it may rightly and profitably take its place alongside of, and in anticipation of, knowledge. But, once that condition is neglected, once we begin to say 'I believe though truth testify against me,' once we echo Tertullian's *credo quia impossibile*, or, with Luther, in our zeal for what we suppose to be religion, assail reason with all the resources of passion and contempt — from that moment our attitude, instead of being legitimate and admirable, becomes one of the most disastrous and the most immoral which it is possible to assume.

Faith, then, in the sense in which I am using the term, is distinguished from knowledge, but is not necessarily opposed to it, though it may easily be misled into opposition. And, being

distinguished from knowledge, the kind of support it gives is not, or should not be, intellectual certainty. On the contrary, faith would seem to be an expression of the imagination and the will, rather than of the intellect, though it be from the intellect that it takes its form. It is closer to music and poetry than to science. It is the operation of our passion and our desire, shaping in anticipation the forms and features of the unknown land which we are about to explore. I know no better metaphor for it than that—the passion in the explorer's heart, dictating the vision by which he is led. Because there is an horizon, because there is space, because there is the unknown, therefore there is faith. Columbus had faith. But what he discovered was not the world of his dream. Only, the dream helped him to discover it; and, spiritually, we are all in his position. We are Columbuses setting forth on our voyage. We need our dream, but we need also our compass. And the confirmation or dissipation of the dream hangs upon reality. But while, in this sense, faith must wait upon truth, it is also true, in another sense, that truth waits upon faith. For the impulse to pursue truth is itself a form of

faith. We hope that truth is obtainable; we desire and will to attain it; we dream its attainment as we go in quest of it. And, but for that dream, and that hope, and that will, we should never start at all. Faith is the sense and the call of the open horizon. If we abstract it from the forms in which we clothe it, from the specific beliefs which are, as it were, its projection into the intelligence, it presents itself as the spring of our whole life, including our intellectual life. It is the impulse to grow and expand; and, just because it is that, it has itself no form, but may assume any form. It is a taper burning, now bright, now dim, and changing colour and substance with every change in the stuff it consumes. The frailest thing we know, it is also the least perishable; for it is a tongue of the central fire that burns at the heart of the world.

THE END

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